



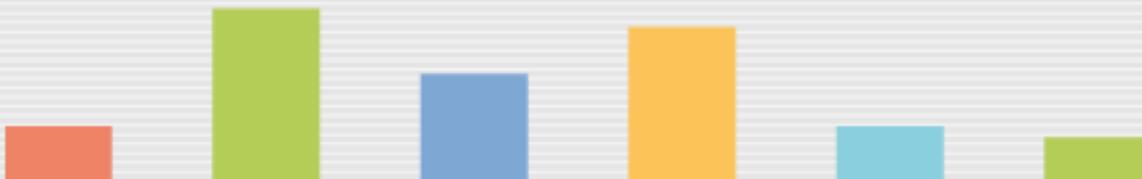
European Monitoring Centre  
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

# Setting the scene: recent cannabis policy developments in Europe

## Lisbon Addictions 2022

Liesbeth Vandam, PhD, HoS support to policy, Public Health Unit, EMCDDA

Structured session: emerging changes in Europe's cannabis situation: policy preparedness and responses to a dynamic situation



# Thanks to colleagues

Brendan Hughes

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Iciar Indave

Marica Ferri

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....



# In this presentation...

- Cannabis: new developments for Europe's most popular illicit drug
- Cannabis policy: increasingly complex in Europe
  - Recreational cannabis policies
  - Medical use of cannabis
  - Commercial sales of low THC cannabis products



# Cannabis: new developments for Europe's most popular illicit drug

- **Cannabis Use:** 48 million males and around 31 million females report ever using cannabis
- 15.5 % of 15-34 year olds used cannabis in the last year
- **Average THC content:** resin now twice herbal cannabis, 21 % vs 11 %, reflecting drug market innovation
- **Cannabis products:** complex market, extracts and edibles (high THC content), CBD products (low THC content)

## Cannabis

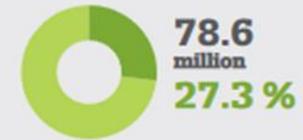


Adults (15–64)

Last year use

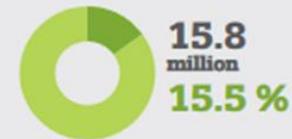


Lifetime use



Young adults (15–34)

Last year use



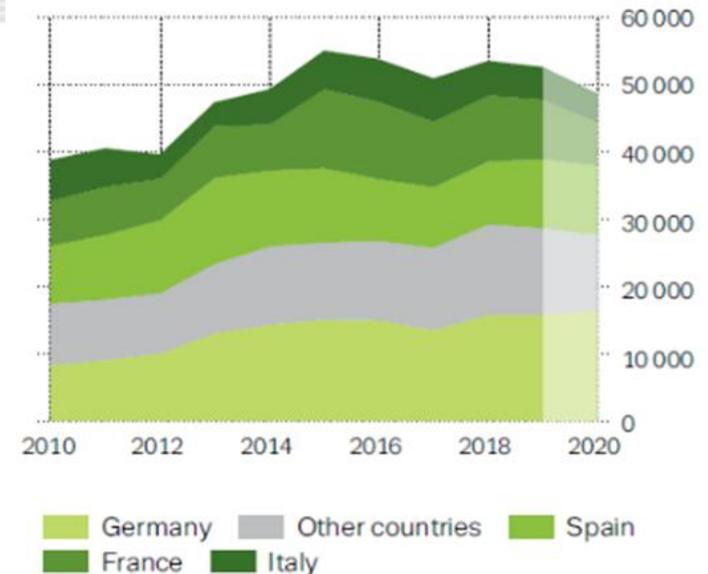
National estimates of use in last year



# Cannabis: new developments for Europe's most popular illicit drug

- Concern about reports of **adulteration** with synthetic cannabinoids, which can be highly potent and toxic
- **Cannabis related problems:** cannabis is responsible for 45 % of all first-time treatment entries and prominent in presentations to emergency services
- High potency of products & cannabis harms?

Trends in first-time entrants



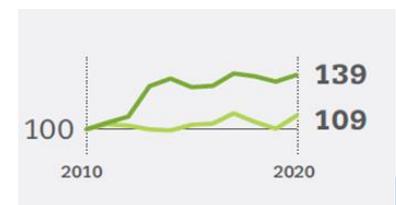
## Indexed trends

Retail price  
and potency

### Cannabis resin



### Cannabis herb



# Cannabis policy: increasingly complex in Europe

## Cannabis policies now encompass:

- control of illicit cannabis
- regulation of cannabis for medical uses
- other emerging uses and forms, including as ingredients in some commercial products

**Regulatory status:** Some EU MS declared intention to permit limited supply of cannabis for recreational purposes

**Medical use of cannabis:** allowed by most EU MS

**Growing complexity in cannabis based products traded in the EU**



# Recreational cannabis policies

- **Some EU MS are developing recreational cannabis policies**
- **Malta:** legislated in 2021 for home grow, use in private, clubs
- **Luxembourg:** planning to permit home growing
- **Germany:** exploring systems to permit legal cannabis sales, and home grow
- **Netherlands:** piloting a model for a closed cannabis supply chain in 10 of 350 municipalities
- **Non EU Switzerland:** allows cities to experiment, with max 5000 consumers per city
- Importance of monitoring the impact of regulatory changes and this requires good baseline data ; all proposals include a plan for evaluation the regulatory changes.



# Recreational cannabis policies

- Policy components for regulated cannabis supply:
  - home grow and use
  - non-profit closed clubs
  - state sales
  - commercial sales
- Policy objectives:
  - Public health
  - Crime and public safety
  - Society
- Policy objectives influence choice of policy components
- Defines monitoring and evaluation needs.

The objects and reasons of this Bill consist of the establishment of the Authority on the Responsible Use of Cannabis and of the limited decriminalisation of certain cannabis related activities for the purpose of allowing for a balance between individual freedom in the limited and responsible personal use of cannabis and other social requirements.

Bill to establish the Authority on the Responsible Use of Cannabis and to amend various laws relating to certain cannabis activities

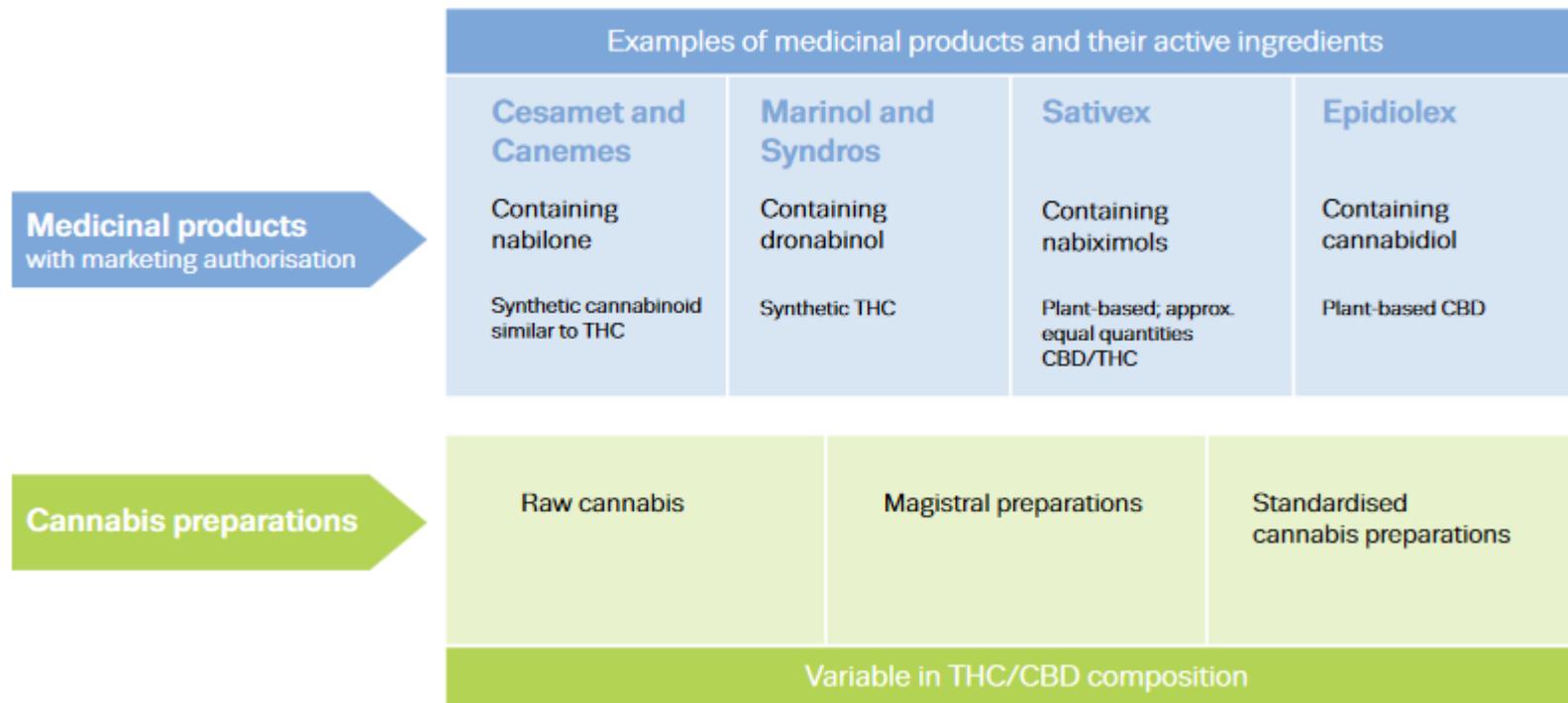
“[Dispensing of cannabis through shops] aims to enable quality control, prevent the distribution of contaminated substances, and ensure youth protection and consumers’ health protection... [it] will be introduced in an effort to improve youth protection as well as health protection of consumers and to curtail the black market.”

Key issues paper by the federal Government on the introduction of the controlled dispensing of cannabis to adults for recreational purposes, 26 October 2022



# Medical use of cannabis: allowed by most EU MS

## Cannabis and cannabinoids used for medical purposes — a broad typology



# Medical use of cannabis and cannabinoids

- In addition to medicinal products, an increasing number of countries also allow **cannabis preparations** for medical use
- A variety of approaches at national level
- Different indications and applications
- **Cultivation** of cannabis for medical purposes: export or domestic use
- **2019:** first time approval of a cannabis derived medicinal product at EU level (Epidiolex)
- **2020:** Rescheduling of cannabis in international drug control conventions
- **2022:** Eurobarometer: 7 in 10 respondents think cannabis should be available for medical use
- Continued patient interest and renewed scientific interest → evidence for the effectiveness?



# Commercial sales of low-THC cannabis products



- Low-THC cannabis products offered for sale in the majority of countries
- Mimicking illicit drug market or products targeted at health and well-being (different marketing strategies)
- Concerns around product quality: contamination, actual versus claimed content
- Regulatory challenges!
- Products might not be controlled under drug laws in some countries, but manufacture and sale may be limited by other trade regulations

# General considerations ...

- A context of rapid change and a complicated policy landscape
- Definition of 'cannabis' ...
- Impact of cannabis regulation on public health? Have policy objectives been achieved? What are the unintended consequences?
- What do we know about cannabis harms? Evidence for high THC products and mental health problems.
- Increasing availability of cannabis for medical purposes → what is the evidence? Implications for driving?
- Interventions: what evidence exists for cannabis treatment and harm reduction interventions?
- The importance of carefully considered and rigorously implemented policy monitoring and evaluation frameworks.





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